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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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This is the week, or specifically the day, for some really outrageous of hot topic to focus an editorial on! A few hours ago I got home from the dentist (actually a periodontist) and the novocain is wearing off! I had some surgery done in my mouth and I know I'm going to be hurtin' for awhile! Pain always breeds good editorial fodder! And there's the realization that I get to do it again the not-too-distant future!

Focus, Dana, focus! Spring has to be on the way - the temperature was in the 60's today (Thursday) and the sun was shining. Old Man Winter must have forgot about us in New England this year; and I'm not complaining, still. Maybe I'll get to grill some steaks outside again this weekend!

Well, there aren't any hot topics this week for me to take advantage, so I think I'm going to move on right into this week's issue. There is a lot of interesting news this week, so let's jump right in!

Until next time...

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xTOS Developers Meeting

From March 8 to 10 the first xTOS developer meeting took place in Dresden, Germany, where hard and software developers of the Atari market participated.

During the three days, agreement over the exact hardware specifications could be settled, and should be up on the xTOS website soon.

At the meeting, Milan Computer declared that they will provide the overworked TOS-version, so that actual versions can be used.

This means that the AtlanTOS (provisional project name) contains a TOS Kernel, on which MiNT is loaded. Which AES is finally used, is not

completely clear yet. A possibility is to use a developed version of the AES 4.x in the Milan TOS.

The compatibility with old ST programs and games is to be ensured with a integrated ST emulator. Clean GEM/TOS programs will of course run directly.

http://www.st-computer.net

EasyMiNT v1.351

EasyMiNT v1.351 is now available for download. A lot of bugs are fixed, and support for Medusa and Hades computers is added.

http://www.ndh.net/home/kehr/atari/Atari.htm

AEX For The Falcon

AEX is a MIDI program for the Atari, which simulates the classic sequencers of the early 80’s, used by artists such as Tangerine Dream and Jean Michel Jarre. A new version is available for the Atari Falcon, which offers a 256-color interface.

http://www.myatari.net/issues/mar2002/aex.htm

Orphaned Projects Page Updated

A couple of nice packages are added to TOPP:

All the Hybrid Art MIDI applications that recently were released on Tim’s Atari Midi World

* CZ-Android
* DX-Android
* GenEdit
* Ludwig
* EZ-Score Plus

A drawing program for the Atari Falcon, by Mickaºl Pointier

* Rembrandt

http://topp.atari-users.net/

New Ethernet Package For The Atari

EtherNEA is a network-package for 16/32-bit Ataris. In addition the package contains hardware plans for an ACSI ISA adapter for use of

Ne2000 and/or NE1000-cards. Drivers for STinG, MagiCNet and MiNTNet are supplied.

http://home.arcor.de/thomas.redelberger/prj/atari/

AtarICQ 0.153 Released

The developers of AtarICQ have announced:

Finally we have reached the state were we feel that the program is once again ready for a new release!

Basically, the OVL has undergone some big changes in order to work with the latest version of the ICQ protocol, v8. As most of you probably already know by now, Mirabilis stopped supporting v5 of the protocol in favour for the new one, which in fact is a sub-protocol of OSCAR, the protocol used by AOL Instant Messenger. In other words, the OVL has had a massive make over in order to get aICQ working again, and Dan Ackerman has made a wonderful job in implementing all the necessary changes.

In GUI, the list of changes is also quite long, and although most things might not seem like drastical stuff, some things are worth mentioning:

* Word wraps are recalculated if msg window is re-sized
* Copy function added for incoming area of msg window
* Popups are created faster (significant difference with large popups!)
* Popup icons are now also involved in 3d motion when selecting entry
* Clicking right mouse button will reverse direction of scrolling
* Double click on string in msg window text area calls for StringServer
* Right click on URLs in msg window presents alternatives via popup
* Preventing mouse shape from changing when live dragging window in XaAES
* VDI-blits used for scrolling in both message window and contact list (much faster)
* Speeded up loading/saving of user info (to HD) quite a bit
* Config loads much faster, especially if you got lots of contacts
* New shortcut: CTRL+Enter will send a msg and then close msg window

For more details, check out aicq site, and update.txt found in distribution zip file.

While most things that the old client could do is already supported now, there are a few things that might not.

1) You can’t yet create new ICQ accounts
2) Changing what list a contact is on (visible/invisible) might take a reconnect to get into effect
3) You *definitely* need to adjust the server (to login.icq.com) and port (to 5190), else aICQ will lock up tight.

Me and Dan hope that the new release will work out alright for all of you, but should any questions or problems occur, please do let us know, either through this email list, or on the aICQ forum (linked to from aICQ homepage)

Have fun, and cu all on ICQ ;)

http://aicq.atari-users.net/

Aniplayer v2.19 Released

A new version of Aniplayer was released today. Featuring numerous bugfixes and improvements, including support for DivX4-files.

http://aniplay.atari.org/

DX Android Released!

Hi All

Looks like this is a good month for Atari-MIDI releases, as I have been beta-testing with a certain David Leaver in working with the original source code of DX Android (by Tom Bajoras) He was finally able to take out the copy protection, so now we have a working edition of this fabulous program.

Go here:

http://groups.yahoo.com/group/atari-midi-archives/files/SOUNDS/Yamaha/Dx7/dxdroid.zip

(copy/paste whole thing to your browser address field)

Its only about 50K. You will need a blank disc ready when you start the program to put your sounds onto.Read the TXT file as we have put together a tutorial (from what I was able to figure out without a manual! :-) Works in ST Med or St HI res.

Here is a brief description from the TXT file:
==========
DX ANDROID by Tom Bajoras. Assembled by David Leaver from a modified version of the original source code. Released as freeware.

A little history:

The program was originally named DX-Droid, but had to change its name to appease the dark side of the force..err... George Lucus and friends, so the final version was DX-Android. There were even ads in the electronic music magazines at the time with a picture of a droid (very akin to Star Wars) playing a DX7 and ST computer along with a TX816 rack!

Those with DX7's and other 6 Op synths today can still use this excellent program. For analysis of FM, its many screens and layout should please the more intellectually minded as well as lay musicians who still use FM. DX-Android was one of the first programs to incorporate Random Patch generation, thus making it a landmark application in its time.

It works in steem as well! (Steem is an Atari emulator that runs on a PC. (See: http://tamw.atari-users.net.steem.htm) Before running the program in steem, put a virtual blank disc in the virtual A drive (by using the disc manager)

Tom Bajoras also gave me about 8 discs of sounds. I have to figure out how to create disc images..so time will tell. I will also be adding it to the Hybrid Arts page on TAMW. Still have to make screen shots. Will keep you informed.

Have fun with DX Android! Anyone ever work with this program?

TimC

Tim's Atari MIDI World
http://tamw.atari-users.net

Hang Loose Online Again

After a long time Hang Loose is online again.. FTP is not working but should be there in 2 Days.

www.atari-warez.com

MyAtari 2002 Awards & March Issue Launched

Matthew Bacon, Editor of MyAtari, submitted:

I am pleased to announce that we have recently launched the March 2002 issue of MyAtari magazine. It is currently available on-line at www.myatari.net

The issue includes a world exclusive tutorial of ACE (by New Beat Productions), How to create Calamus fonts from Postcript Type 1 fonts, Christoph Brinken asks "Have Atari users got a future?" and Tim Conrardy takes a detailed look at AEX (by Dr Ambient).

The other big news this month is that MyAtari are holding its 2002 Awards! We need you to cast you vote in the following categories:

- Best Atari web site of the year
- Best Programmer of the year
- Best Commercial release of the year
- Best Shareware release of the year
- Best PD/Freeware release of the year
- Best Game release of the year
- Best Hardware upgrade of the year
- Best Atari supporting company of the year
- Best Atari magazine of the year
- Outstanding contribution to the Atari community

All you need to do it complete and submit the form on our site - easy eh? Please note that you only have until 7th April 2002, so every vote counts!

http://www.myatari.net/

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->A-ONE User Group Notes! - Meetings, Shows, and Info!
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CCAG 2002!!!

For Immediate Release to all Internet and related groups!

The Classic Computer And Gaming(CCAG) Show 2002 is on!

"We, the CCAG organizers, regret that it took so long to officially announce the CCAG 2002 Show. However, we are also very glad that the CCAG 2001 Show did NOT take place after September 11th, 2001. Had CCAG 2001 taken place after 9-11, we would have had to cancel. Because we had used a National Guard Armory for the previous two CCAG's, we were not able to rent the Armory again after the events of 9-11. We have been able to locate and secure a facility for CCAG 2002! We again apologize for the delay, as we were only able to know with certainty, in the past several days. See you all at the CCAG 2002!!!"

CCAG 2002 Staff

The Classic Computer And Gaming Show 2002 will be held on May 25th, 2002 from 8AM till 2 PM. Vendor setup is on the 24th from 5:30PM till 9PM, and from 6:30AM till 8AM on the 25th. Show location is at the St. John Lutheran Church, 11333 Granger Road, Garfield Hts. Ohio, 44125.

Here is our own site for more information and current status of vendors and attendees.

www.ccagshow.com

Table rental is $5 this year, and admission is only $2. The admission fee will also allow you to be eligible for a drawing at 1PM, the 25th, for an Arcade machine! (You will need a way to take the machine home with you!)

The web site, www.ccagshow.com, has site info, table layouts, map info, etc.

We hope to see you there at the CCAG 2002!

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. I can't believe how fast the weeks are flying by. It seems like just the other day that I was wishing everyone a happy new year.

I guess that it's just part and parcel of getting older... jeez, you'd think that Dana would have warned me about that. <ducking the heavy object no doubt now being hurled in my direction>

Another sure sign that I'm getting old is the fact that I'm becoming less and less hopeful about "the younger generation". I can often be heard saying things like, "Hmmm... I guess Darwin was wrong", and "It's time to throw some chlorine into the gene pool", and some of the time I even believe it. What bothers me most is that I can remember my father and grandfather having the same kind of attitude. What bothers me even more than that is the fact that I thought they were ignorant and foolish at the time. Of course, my father takes great joy in reminding me of this, and since he hasn't forgotten what I was like back then, he's in hog heaven.

But then again, every once in a while there is a slight glimmer of brightness seen in the next generation. Not often, mind you, but once in a while. And perhaps that's the way it's always been.

Well, let's get on with the news, hints, tips, and info from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

Peter Miller asks about fixing a disk:

"I've got a ST disk but when I use the Windows Floppy Disk Copy tutorial, it tells me there are 2 bad sectors on the disk. Is this disk useless or can I save it somehow?"

Edward Baiz tells Peter:

"There are programs like Disk Doctor that will fix that problem. You can download such programs on the net. Oh, I am talking about Atari ST programs. If you do not have one, I would think there are such programs for the PC available."

'Elliot' adds:

"It is probably not the disk, more likely that fact that PCs are notorious for not being able to use more than 79 tracks. Can you not try it on a proper ST and use a program such as FCOPY to see if it is the disk.

FCOPY can also help repair bad sectors and tracks, however if it is a game then there may well be a copy protection hidden in these tracks, repairing them will render the game useless.

If it is simply a data disk and the sectors are bad then the data is most likely gone."

Hallvard Tangeraas asks about some utility apps:

"Can someone please tell me more about GEMram and Winx?

The docs are very technical and mostly in German, but I've gathered that they have something to do with loading TOS into RAM, which is (for some unexplained reason) needed in certain cases where you want to fix bugs/limitations of TOS.

I've read about (and downloaded) "SHbuf" which is used to increase the size of the "NEWDESK.INF" file (the desktop configuration file) for TOS 2.06 to 32 Kbytes (the original maximum size being 4 Kbytes).

As for Winx... I think it has something to do with getting extra features in TOS, but I have no idea why/what.

Can someone lay out the facts for me?
And most of all.... please tell me how to try this out. The docs aren't very detailed about that."

Grzegorz Pawlik tells Hallvard:

"You have to put GEMRAM.PRG and WINX.PRG in your AUTO folder, and (optionally) WINX.CPX in the CPX folder. WINX.PRG must be after GEMRAM.

If you have TT-RAM memory, you may use ROMSPEED.PRG by Uwe Seimet *instead* of GEMRAM.PRG.

The function of GEMRAM is to rewrite TOS from the Read Only Memory, where it cannot be modified, into the RAM, where it can be modified (by WinX for example).

ROMSPEED does the same, but rewrites TOS to the TT-RAM, which additionally results in a *great* speed improvement.

WinX does not only fix certain TOS bugs (Arrowfix patch) or limitations (allows to open much more windows, but *not* with the Desktop...) but also adds real-time window moving, scrolling and resizing - something that is available in MagiC or N.AES for example.
Real-time window scrolling is very useable, and whoever tries that will never want to live without it ;-)

Those real-time window operation features work only with TOS 2.06 and later versions (3.06 for TT or Hades, 4.0x on Falcon.)

WINX.CPX is for easy configuration of WinX (which is saved in WINX.INF file in the AUTO folder). There are separate configurations for various applications allowed, which is useful with old programs that might not support all the WinX features (such as scrolling the window contents in an untopped window, AFAIK the viewer in StZip or LharcShell has problems with it.)

After placing WINX.INF in AUTO folder you do not actually need WINX.CPX for WinX to work properly.

And my WINX.INF looks like that:

```
# WINX Infos

GLOBAL= 5-6-7-8-13-14-15-16-
```

```
=  # GEM-Desk
*= 8-10- # Default

DDELAY= 460,0,1000,2000
WFONT_OFF= 1,10
GADGET_OFF= 0,0
LOADFONT=
```

I don’t remember all WinX improvements, but I think real-time window operations (2.06 or more), exceeding the number of windows to 40, Arrowfix patch, possibility to move the windows off the left screen border and "intelligent" redrawing of the window contents are the most important functions. With TOS 1.0 it makes also possible to scroll the window contents when holding the mouse button on one of the arrows in the slider (normally in TOS 1.0 you have to point the slider arrow and click *repeatedly*...)"

Now Hallvard asks about using TOS image files:

"I’d like to know more about installing TOS 2.06 from so called "TOS image files". Apart from the (more or less legal) TOS image files, what else is needed, and how is it done?
I’m guessing some sort of "TOS loader" in the AUTO folder, which finds the TOS image file and loads it into memory.

By the way, how much memory does something like this steal?
I’ve been under the impression that even a standard ST/F/M/E will read TOS from the ROM chips, then load it into RAM (simply because ROM is too slow to be efficient) -is this correct?"

Matthias Arndt tells Hallvard:

"Yes, there’s one on the net available. But I neither tried it nor do I remember how it was called.

Any TOS will steal as much RAM as itself is big and some plus for screen and disk handling.

All STs read the TOS directly from the ROMs. You have always all memory (without some space for TOS information and the screen) available.
TOS only gets loaded into RAM if you use a TOS on disk like the first ones or a boot loader."

Edward Baiz adds:

"Well I have a TOS image file of TOS 1.0. It exists by itself on a disk and not in any folder. It loads automatically when the computer boots with the the disk in it’s drive."

Hallvard tells Edward:

"But since there are loads of TOS images floating around on the net for all versions I suppose there are programs used for loading them as well, or are they mainly used for all those Atari ST emulators out there for PCs etc?

I found something interesting at the following website:

 http://home.hccnet.nl/v.d.burg/atari/framesets/frameset_tos.html

where it says:

```
-------------------------------
Software Images of TOS
----------------------
It is possible, though, to use other TOS versions without unscrewing
your Atari, by loading software images of TOS (tos.img) during boot
time. You need a program for this in the AUTO folder, like tosboot.prg.
The exception that proves the rule and doesn't need any other programs,
is a version of TOS 3.01 called american.prg that will run directly from
the AUTO folder. Besides the tosboot program, you need the software
image of your desired TOS version: these images are lying around on the
internet, for example try Little Green Desktop. More than 1 MB of memory
is also very welcome if you still want to do something useful, since the
TOS will now be loaded into the precious memory of your Atari... Most of
the software versions of TOS will survive a reset (but obviously not an
OFF/ON).
-----------------------------
```

the question of course is..... where do I find "TOSBOOT.PRG"?"

Brent Eamer tells Hallvard:

"Try http://home.hccnet.nl/v.d.burg/atari/framesets/frameset_tos.html

Download ROM_UTIL.ZIP, there is a program named tosboot.tos. Even
though it is not tosboot.prg I think the functionality is similar."

Mark Duckworth asks for advice about his Falcon:

"After doing a bit of research and IRCing, I decided to come here for a
bit more help. My C-Lab Falcon MK-2 with standard atari 14 meg ram
board, scsi and ide drives, etc. has been having odd symptoms since
the day I bought it. The symptoms?

1) Earlier version of Groumf Tracker worked fine, latest version will
play fine but gives a messed up display. Seems like a programming
issue but I am the only one to report this phenomena. Also will
display artifacts like something is writing to video memory!

2) under MagiC, TOS, and MiNT, Aniplay while playing mp2 or mp3 (DSP)
will get a crackling in the left speaker. Changing some settings can
get the crackle to be in the right speaker. Originally I thought
turning off DMA transfers would stop it but it doesn't. I also thought
Nocrew's mp2 player did not produce crackling but it does too! Even
FalcAMP does. Falcamp behaves oddly under MagiC. When I move the
mouse fast or do other things, the mp3 playback will actually slow.

3) MagiC runs perfectly... I know right? It's a falcon that runs MagiC
fine... but MiNT on the other hand has all sorts of problems. XaAES
crashes 5 minutes after starting.. keystrokes are stolen between
vconsoles. N.Aes doesn't work much at all and refuses to start in 256
color mode. I have done identical setups under aranym as my falcon. I
am not crazy or setting something up wrong, aranym works perfectly, my
falcon doesn't. Also under N.Aes tos2win crashes with a bus error when
trying to run bash, whereas under Xaaes it will run but will be deathly
slow to do anything.

The diagnosis? Well some have suggested bad ram in the DSP, others

have suggested bad DMA fix. Taking the DSP problem into mind, it's worth noting that the earlier version of Groumf tracker works PERFECTLY and has never crashed, ALL DEMOS I HAVE EVER TRIED including Hmm have worked perfectly. DSP jpeg decoder works perfectly. DSP effects like echo and reverb work perfectly. AVR playback works perfectly, everything is fine except mp2/mp3 playback. I have gone over the mp2/mp3's with a fine tooth comb too.. they are good encodings.. they play perfectly on any other machine.

The DMA fix? Well referencing this DMA fix:
http://atari.nvg.org/cpu_accel/

I have found that mine differs severely. The other two resistors near R221 are removed, legs 13 and 12 are not jumpered together. The trace of R216 is NOT cut on mine, and the resistor is gone! The IC that is piggy backed is the right chip and in fact the only identical connection seems to be power and ground.... hrmmf..... maybe clab borked it?

I really care about my falcy and I'd love to be able to use the DSP to it's full potential to decode mp2's at 0% cpu usage, but the evil crackling on bass hits is horrible....

The last thing I must note is that the output gain of the mp2 and mp3 players seems significantly higher than that of groumf tracker and all of the demos which work fine. This audio crackling could be some internal DSP gain setting which is set way high (for mine to handle).

Anyone have any ideas.. should I redo my dma fix to match the one listed and replace the piggy backed IC which appears to have green stuff all over it? (not copper oxidation).. Perhaps wait for the CT60 which might somehow magically fix any and all of my problems? ;)

Any help would be much appreciated!"

Stephen Moss tells Mark:

"I don't know about items 1 or 3, however someone else reported crackling speakers and I suspect that your problem is the same as theirs, it's your speakers that are not up to the job not the Falcon. Solution - buy better speakers (20Hz-22KHz)."

Mark tells Stephen:

"Unfortunately, that cannot be the case. My Falcon has been tested using Harmon Kardon speakers, my Denon stereo system a pair of sony studio quality headphones, a set of cambridge soundworks speakers. Tons of speakers that work fine for anything and everything don't work for my falcon. I definitely the think the falcon is suspect."

Citrad Fertr adds:

"Probably a SDMA problem. Try to replay some mp3 (128kbps or more) with Aniplayer, enable DMA transfers and listen. If you notice any strange sounds, as strange synthetic "birdsing", then you need a new clock-patch.

BTW, I designed a clock-patch which is suitable for any Falcon with or without acceleration (probably except CT2 or AB040). As a starting point I used the Nemesis clock-patch (I used this circuit also in my Phantom accelerator), which 100% fixes all SDMA problems, but you need

the right SN7404(N) IC. It means you must test each IC manually, even they are all from the same manufacturer !!! In other case your Falcon will be less stable especially when it runs Cubase or other MIDI software. The wrong IC causes only incompatibility, not any DMA problems.

So in my clock-patch I use the SN7404 (from Texas Instruments) only for SDMA and 74F04 for the rest signals. It works perfectly in my machine, even it’s overclocked from 32/16 to 50/25Mhz."

Well folks, that’s it for this week. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week’s Gaming Section - Xbox Launches In Europe!
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->A-ONE’s Game Console Industry News   - The Latest Gaming News!
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Microsoft Brings Xbox to Europe

U.S. software giant Microsoft prepared on Wednesday for the third and final leg of the global launch of its games console Xbox, which will hit shops across Europe at midnight.

The games machine, Microsoft’s first foray into the $20 billion a year global video game industry, is already on sale in the United States and Japan where it was launched in previous months with a global marketing budget of $500 million.

The device has been hit by manufacturing teething problems in Japan where it was introduced last month. Some of the machines make small scratches on gaming discs, which forced Microsoft to offer to replace consoles.

Microsoft said it was "extremely unlikely" anything similar would happen in Europe.

Mimicking similar events in the U.S. where Microsoft-founder Bill Gates (news - web sites) challenged gamers at midnight in New York stores,

European launch parties for the X-box are planned in over a dozen nations. The product will retail for $423 in Britain and $419 in other parts of Europe.

In London, Virgin Megastores will pit celebrities and gamers against each other when shops open specially at midnight as it starts selling the first hundreds of boxes.

In Madrid the legendary Bernabeu soccer stadium of Real Madrid will be lit in "Xbox green" spotlights, and in Paris shops will open at midnight. Meanwhile a French team of six gamers will be locked into a house for five days, battling it out on the console in front of a TV audience.

In Germany cable TV station Giga will broadcast the local launch party live on its channel.

Microsoft said consumers would not have to pre-register for the nocturnal event. It had sufficient boxes available for impulse buyers. Even if retailers were to sell out in coming weeks, consoles should be available throughout Europe within 72 hours, supplied from a Hungarian plant of contract electronics manufacturer Flextronics which makes the box.

The Xbox has in any case been on pre-sale for many weeks at retailers around Europe and with online shop Amazon.com. Microsoft declined to specify demand in Europe, but reiterated it expected to ship between 4.5 and six million boxes worldwide by the end of June.

"We’re really happy with the presales at Amazon," a European Microsoft spokesman said.

The Xbox is Microsoft’s supercharged gaming machine that debuted last November in the U.S. The device goes head to head with Sony Corp (news - web sites).’s PlayStation 2 (news - web sites) console which has been on the market for well over a year and retails for $299.

Nintendo Co. Ltd. will also bring its new console, called GameCube, to Europe on May 3, with a marketing budget of $87.4 million for the region.

Sony recently slashed the price for its PlayStation 2 to make the price difference with Xbox even starker. The device has sold 25 million units since its launch in November 2000. Xbox executives, bent on winning gaming street credibility for the new rival to PlayStation 2, have adamantly denied the machine is anything but a true-blue game console.

Fitted with an 8-gigabyte hard drive, a high-speed Internet jack, a main processor based on Intel Corp.’s Pentium III and an Nvidia graphics chip, the Xbox is capable of much more. Industry watchers expect Microsoft to turn the Xbox into an Internet and TV gateway for the home.

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Court Shuts Down ’.usa’ Internet Address Scam

A Chicago court shut down a Web site that capitalized on post-Sept. 11 patriotic fervor to sell Internet domain names ending with a bogus ".usa" suffix, the Federal Trade Commission said on Monday.

Two British citizens launched an aggressive junk e-mail campaign that urged Internet users to sign up for the star-spangled addresses after the hijacking attacks of Sept. 11, the FTC said.

The messages linked to a Web site, (http://www.dotusa.com), that urged users to reserve addresses such as www.surfin.usa, which did not work.

The Web site also sold other fake domains, including .brit, .scot, .sex and .god, said J. Howard Beales, head of the FTC’s consumer-protection division.

"If you think of the Internet as a phone system, these sites are not in the phone book. They’re not even listed," Beales said.

Unlike .com, .net and other established domains, .usa is not recognized by the standards-setting Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, meaning that .usa Web sites and e-mail addresses will not work with most Internet-connected computers.

A lawyer for the defendants, Thomas and Edward Harris Goolnik, said the two ran a legitimate "alternate root" system that operates outside of the ICANN-sanctioned domain-name system.

"All we can say right now is that the defendants deny the allegations," said David Berten, a partner with Competition Law Group in Chicago.

Other alternate root companies market a wide variety of domains from .shop to .golf that are not ICANN-sanctioned, but they commonly disclose that their Web sites will not work without modifications to the user’s browser or Internet service provider.

Because the .usa e-mail and Web site made no such disclosures, the defendants engaged in deceptive advertising, said C. Steven Baker, director of the FTC’s Midwest regional operations.

"Consumers all thought they were buying a domain name they could use on the Internet like .com," Baker said.

Working with the UK’s Office of Fair Trading, the FTC obtained a temporary court order from the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois to turn off the dotusa.com address, FTC officials said.

Any assets in the U.S. are also frozen.

The two agencies will next seek to permanently bar the operation from selling fraudulent domain names and force it to give back the money it collected.

At $59 per registration, the Web site likely took in at least $1 million, Beales said.

While the defendants are UK citizens and their companies are registered in

the UK, FTC officials said they stepped in because U.S. consumers were targeted.

U.S.-based domain-name retailers that had registered www.dotusa.com and related addresses pulled them offline when they received the court order, officials said.

ICANN submitted a statement to the court explaining how the domain-name system works, but did not otherwise participate in the enforcement action, they said.

The .usa domain is similar to the United States' .us domain, a legitimate "country code" managed by Washington-based NeuStar Inc.

Three Web Sites Closed in Spam Inquiry

A federal court has ordered the closing of the Web sites of three companies that used e-mail messages to sell an estimated $1 million worth of nonexistent Web addresses, federal officials said yesterday.

The court's actions came at the request of the Federal Trade Commission as part of the agency's most aggressive move in its campaign against unsolicited commercial e-mail messages, or spam.

Over the last two years, the commission has sent cease-and-desist letters to dozens of companies that send what the F.T.C. considers to be deceptive e-mail, and it has reached a number of settlements. But this was the first legal filing by the agency.

On Feb. 28, the United States District Court for the Northern District of Illinois, Eastern Division, in Chicago, issued an injunction that suspended the registration of the Web sites www.dotusa .com, www.dotsex.com and www.dotstore.com.

The commission said that over the last eight months, the sites had been selling other Web sites whose addresses ended in fictional suffixes like ".usa," ".sex." and ".store" for $59 each.

The commission's complaint named three British companies, TLD Network, Quantum Management and TBS Industries. In addition, the complaint named two men who controlled the companies: Thomas Goolnik and Edward Harris Goolnik of London. The British Office of Fair Trading has been cooperating with the Federal Trade Commission in the investigation.

A lawyer for the Goolniks, David P. Berten of the Competition Law Group in Chicago, said only, "The defendants deny the allegations and will be litigating them."

Though the companies are based in England, the Web site addresses were registered in the United States, giving the court the jurisdiction to order the suspension.

"These spam scammers conned consumers in two ways," J. Howard Beales III, the director of the commission's Bureau of Consumer Protection, said in a statement. "They sent deceptive spam, and they sold worthless Web addresses from their Web sites. By closing down this operation we're sending a strong signal: We will not tolerate deceptive spam."

The agency says it is pursuing more deceptive e-mail cases and might take additional legal action.

Over the last several years, the commission has collected more than eight million commercial e- mail messages, at a rate of about 10,000 a day. Among those were ones that advertised www.dotusa .com.

The site, which tried to capitalize on post-Sept. 11 patriotism fervor, sent out e-mail messages that read: "The latest domain name extension has arrived .USA!!! It's the fresh, new, exciting Web address that is taking the world by storm. Who wants to be .com when you can now be .USA."

Some people bought dozens of addresses in the hope of capitalizing on a gold rush like the one that accompanied the ".com" registrations in the 1990's.

"It was such a great thing because you could get in on the beginning," said Gloria M. Freeman, the chief executive of StaffUSA, a professional placement company. Ms. Freeman first received the e-mail message advertising the new ".usa" domains last November. She said she spent more than $10,000 buying domain addresses like Broadcast.usa and Staff.usa.

But she grew suspicious when she learned that the ".usa" domain had never been approved by the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, the group that regulates new domain suffixes. At that point, she made contact with the trade commission. Because Ms. Freeman charged her purchases by credit card, she has been able to recover her money.

Ms. Freeman said the experience had left her more cautious of advertisements that arrive in her in-box.

"It makes you more wary of spam," she said. "You have to check everything out with a primary source."

Microsoft Working with Justice to Fight Cyber-Crime

Microsoft Chief Executive Steve Ballmer, whose company has been at odds with the U.S. government over antitrust violations, said on Thursday it was working closely with the Justice Department to fight cyber-crime.

"As we think about private and public partnerships, we have to say that this (partnership) is key," said Ballmer, as he outlined the dangers of cyber-crime to the European Policy Center, a private think-tank.

"We've worked very closely, for example, with the Department of Justice in the United States to get additional funding for FBI efforts to target cyber-crime," he said.

"They simply didn't have enough people who were technically expert," he added. "We've loaned our experts but we also think it's very important that government have its own experts as part of the policy process in these issues."

Ballmer said the greatest threat in cyber-crime is that computer systems may be entered and perused without the knowledge of the company involved -- otherwise known as hacking.

"The worst problem is the person peering around in your computer system and you don’t know it," he said.

The co-operation between Justice and Microsoft contrasts with their roles as adversaries in other arenas.

A U.S. trial judge found that Microsoft had used illegal tactics to maintain its Windows operating system monopoly. In June, an appeals court unanimously upheld that lower court finding.

In November, the Justice Department and Microsoft reached a settlement on remedies to address its violations of the law.

Now Justice and Microsoft are in court together, defending that proposed agreement against nine U.S. states that have refused to sign the agreement, arguing that a tougher remedy is required.

Microsoft still faces a continuing investigation by the European Commission for allegedly violating European antitrust laws, but Ballmer declined to say whether he would be holding discussions about those problems during his stay in Brussels.

"Those (talks) are always confidential, of course, between us and the appropriate governmental authorities," he said.

Ballmer said he would not be meeting with the Commission to talk about cyber-crime. "We’re very early in some senses in the dialogue," he said.

Yahoo Details Price Hikes for GeoCities

Web portal Yahoo on Monday introduced two paid services for its home page community GeoCities in an ongoing effort to charge for certain features throughout its site.

As previously reported, Yahoo recently told GeoCities’ home page publishers it would begin charging fees for people using FTP (file transfer protocol), a popular means of publishing content on Web pages. A Yahoo executive attributed the price change to abuse by nonpaying users of FTP and remote loading, and to attempts to address costs of offering the service.

One new GeoCities feature, called GeoCities Plus, will cost $4.95 a month with a one-time $10 setup fee. The service doesn’t serve ads and offers 25MB of storage, FTP access and additional bandwidth.

Additionally, Yahoo unveiled GeoCities Advantage, a package for more advanced Web publishers that includes ad-free space, more sophisticated tools, 100MB of storage and a domain name. The service will cost $19.95 a month with a $25 setup fee.

Google Search Engine Unfazed by ’Googlewhackers’

Search engine darling Google usually gets praise for its results, which are

up to date and free of pay-for-play rankings.

But the popular Internet search engine also is being used by some Web surfers to carry out political and other protests, as well as for extracurricular fun and games.

Two such activities include "Googlewhacking," which challenges users to plug two words without quotes into Google's search engine and come up with a single result, and recent cases of "link-bombing," in which Internet users exploit Google's search methods to manipulate site rankings.

Yankee Group senior analyst Rob Lancaster told NewsFactor that the Google gags and tricks are equivalent to search engine spamming, a common practice, and should not alarm devoted Google groupies.

"I know [Google is] aware of these issues and the ways in which people are trying to take advantage of their technology," Lancaster said. "I doubt that people have been able to do it effectively. I wouldn't see it as a major concern."

The sport of Googlewhacking, which is gaining in popularity and prominence, involves a quest for single-site results on the popular search portal by entering only two words.

There is even the Googlewhack Web site, which keeps track of some of the best "whacks" and chronicles the practice that began early this year.

A statement on the site claims the game is not affecting legitimate Google searchers but calls Google bombs "a more realistic threat."

While it reportedly started as a gag that used Google's search engine to direct Internet searches, the practice of "Google-bombing" has caught on among Web loggers and others, according to recent reports.

By manipulating the number of sites that are linked to one another and keeping them current on Web pages, individuals can improve a site's ranking on Google searches, which include popularity and freshness in their methodology.

Some "bombs" go beyond humor and are aimed at making political or ideological statements, such as a recent effort to bring attention to the case of murdered Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl as well as religious themes.

There have been no reports of marketers' response to the new tactic, but there is speculation that it is only a matter of time before Google's search rankings are manipulated.

Mountain View, California-based Google downplayed the effect of such Internet activities as Googlewhacking or Google bombs on the search engine's results or credibility.

"We don't see this as a problem," Google director of machine learning Peter Norvig told NewsFactor. "It's true we look at the links, but we look at a lot of different things -- more than 100 different factors."

Referring to 150 million search queries daily, Norvig said the Google fun and games had not had any affect on day-to-day searches at Google, adding the company "sees this more as a way of having fun."

"It’s not something where everybody’s coming in and using up all our server time doing Googlewhacks," Norvig said. "We’re happy people are having fun."

The Yankee Group’s Lancaster said that although search engine spamming techniques are advancing, so are the search technologies and algorithms used by Google.

"The folks at Google are pretty smart," Lancaster said, "just as smart as the people trying to spam them or bomb them."

Google’s Norvig said the search engine has not seen any abuse of bombs or other techniques for marketing or other commercial purposes.

"This is just another way to publish links on the Web," he told NewsFactor. "It’s our job to keep track and determine what is a quality site and what’s not."

Free AOL Use Sparks New Worries

Free Web access may be a bygone perk of the dot-com bubble, but it appears to be alive and well at the world’s largest Internet service provider, America Online.

AOL offers a battery of free promotion and retention programs, but it refuses to disclose how many of its subscribers pay nothing for the service. Now, Wall Street is zeroing in on some financial details that it believes offer a guide to this elusive number--and it doesn’t like what it sees.

The concern over AOL’s nonpaying customers comes at a critical time for the ISP. Analysts have been increasingly worried about slowing growth at AOL, with many noting that the ISP took longer than expected to reach its latest subscriber milestone. This week, AOL announced that it now counts 34 million members, but it took nearly two-and-a-half months to add a million newbies--more than twice as long as it took to add the previous million.

In addition, slower growth at AOL has raised concerns about the outlook for parent AOL Time Warner, which for the last year has talked about how AOL would turbocharge Time Warner’s media properties. Buffeted by an advertising slowdown, AOL Time Warner has drawn fire from Wall Street. Several analysts have indicated that they might revise AOL Time Warner’s already-lowered 2002 estimates if AOL’s subscriber growth continues to slow.

The worries over the freebie issue were sparked by a widening gap between the price of an AOL subscription and the average amount the company collects per subscriber. Although the service charges $23.90 a month--up from $21.95 after a price hike last year--the average monthly subscription revenue per member has hovered between just $17 and $18, according to calculations provided by three Wall Street analysts. Those figures are as much as 29 percent below the list price.

That doesn’t mean that nearly 30 percent of all AOL members are using the service for free: The company has several pricing plans and distribution deals, which cut into its margins. But the size of the shortfall offers

strong evidence that AOL's much-vaunted growth has increasingly become dependent on free sign-ups, analysts said.

"The significance is that (the gap) used to be less than 5 percent two to three years ago," said Michael Gallant, an equity analyst at CIBC World Markets.

Other ISPs offer freebies, including Microsoft's MSN, which offers a 90-day free trial as part of an aggressive AOL-poaching program. But the issue is particularly sticky for AOL these days because the company's growth rate has begun to slide.

The numbers support Wall Street concerns that the U.S. dial-up market may be nearing saturation--a development that does not bode well for the ISP leader. Indeed, there is no doubt that AOL has increased its reliance on promotions, having extended the time period offered in its ubiquitous free trials from 30 days to 45 days last year.

J. Michael Kelly, chief operating officer of the AOL unit, declined to say how may people were using the service for free. But he said the gap between average subscription revenue per member and the actual subscription price primarily resulted from bundling deals with PC manufacturers, which are accounted for differently than ordinary subscriptions.

Certain PC makers, such as Gateway, offer free AOL service for certain time periods to new computer buyers. When someone signs up for the deal, AOL pays the PC maker a bounty fee, and the PC maker pays the ISP a monthly fee up to the amount of an AOL subscription.

AOL's revenue is affected in different ways. If its bounty fee equals the PC maker's monthly payments, then the figures cancel each other out. Sometimes the PC maker's payments exceed AOL's bounty and become revenue. If AOL pays a higher bounty than a PC maker's payment, then the loss is recorded as a marketing expense.

The end result is more subscribers, but not necessarily more revenue, Kelly said.

"This channel has gotten bigger for us," Kelly said. "Each year things change, but the bundled programs have the biggest influence on revenue per member."

Subscriber defection, dubbed "churn" in the business, has been a problem at AOL since its inception. Although the service stopped breaking out its churn numbers several years ago, it has devised a program to persuade newcomers to become paying members.

Called its "Member Save" program, AOL customer service representatives offer free additional months to buy more time from people contemplating defection. Programs such as Member Save are common in the magazine industry, where potential defectors are offered subscription discounts. Likewise, AOL has always aggressively thrown free months of service at people.

Some former AOL customers said they were heavily courted by the ISP when they tried to terminate their accounts, and in some cases they were offered free hours as an inducement to stay.

A.J. Turpen, a student in San Francisco who recently dropped AOL, said a

representative offered two months of free service in a protracted effort to extend the contract.

"When I talked to them on the phone, they were insistent that they weren't going to disconnect me. They were going to give me two months free service," Turpen said. "I was insistent. We had that argument four or five times."

Not everyone is offered the same deal on the way out, however.

Another former AOL member said she received several calls from the ISP six months ago when she switched to take advantage of free service from MSN, but she was not offered any free hours.

Still, analysts wonder if AOL's efforts to step up longer free-trial periods for new members, coupled with aggressive efforts to retain subscribers, could be playing a large role in widening the gap between the service's standard price and the average revenue pulled in per member--a practice that in effect converts subscribers to free users, at least over the short haul.

Member Save "certainly is part of it, but frankly we have absolutely no data to track that," First Albany analyst Youssef Squali said. "Their churn numbers, which they don't even release, don't catch those."

AOL's Kelly reiterated that bundling deals with PC manufacturers remains the biggest contributor to stagnating revenue per subscriber figures, not the doling out of free hours.

"This certainly will have some effect, but it's not the biggest," Kelly said. "Part of the Member Save process is that I have you, and if you use more sticky apps, your membership will hopefully continue. There are attractive economics here."

Regardless of whether free users become permanent ones, there's an advantage in keeping more people on the service. AOL counts its free-trial members in its audience numbers, a technique that appeals to advertisers and marketers. Free-trial members can purchase items through AOL's shopping partners and use all of the online service's features such as e-mail and instant messaging.

So even though there are millions of people who aren't paying for AOL at a given moment, these same millions are valuable to the service.

The issue is one of cost, according to David Simons, managing director of institutional research firm Digital Video Investments. It's not about how many people become subscribers, but more about how much total revenue AOL can tap from each subscriber.

"The mistake that AOL has made is that it should have stopped emphasizing subscriber growth a long time ago," Simons said. "It never weaned investors from the intense focus on subscriber growth when what matters more is revenue per subscriber."

Spyware Watches Where You Surf

Your computer may be watching you.

If you download free software from the Net -- especially the ragingly popular music-sharing programs and Web games -- chances are you've also gotten more than you've bargained for. Freeloading programs can quietly piggyback onto your PC during the download process and then do things surreptitiously once they get there.

The software -- dubbed adware, stealthware and spyware -- can track your surfing habits, use your Net connection to report back to a home base and deliver targeted ads to you. It also can collect your personal information and store it in databases.

Companies that allow adware to tack onto their downloads say they do so because that's the only way they can offer their software for free; adware companies pay to have their software carried.

Many people who download free software understand that the price they pay is sharing private information and getting ads. But critics charge that some companies don't properly notify users.

Once installed, adware can do almost anything. Most of the time, it tracks which sites are visited and delivers targeted ads, for which companies generally pay more. For example, if you're searching for baby names and diapers, the software may deliver a minivan ad to you.

The end result? When you download that new free game, if it came with adware, you'll start getting pop-up (and pop-under) ads. They may pop up only when you play or they may pop up randomly.

Because adware is still relatively new and totally unregulated, companies are still experimenting. Some adware just collects and stores data, which can include highly personal information.

Adware is likely to grow as programs that allow you to share music or play games boom in popularity. Freeware and shareware sites have grown 315% in the past year to more than 4,300, according to Websense, a company that monitors Internet behavior. That means adware, often the only source of revenue for these free software companies, also has been growing, says Harold Kester of Websense.

"There is an industry that revolves around the secret collection of data about everything a person does on the Internet, and that can include all sorts of personal and sensitive information," says Chris Hoofnagle of the Electronic Privacy Information Center.

Companies sometimes tell you upfront about the software and what it does. But most of the time, you have to slog through the fine print in user agreements to discover that a program intends to spy on you. "If the FBI (news - web sites) was doing this, people would be screaming bloody murder," says Richard Smith, a security and privacy expert.

Under those agreements, "most consumers who are using the products don't seem to understand the relationships they're getting into," says Ari Schwartz of the Center for Democracy and Technology.

If they read the fine print, they might find a few surprises.

One company, VX2, shook up the Net earlier this year when it started showing up on people's computers after downloading software such as music-swapping program Audio Galaxy (which no longer uses VX2), on which

it hitched a free ride.

Deep in VX2's privacy policy, the company states that it not only tracks Web sites visited, but also collects "name and address information from online forms that you fill out." In addition, it tracks query terms entered into search engines and information about your PC.

VX2 spokesman Tim Martin says that while the company reserves the right to collect that kind of data, it is not doing so now. He adds that the company wants to be upfront about what it does.

Similarly, surfers have a cumbersome dig through a user agreement to find that a program associated with Kazaa, one of the top-ranked free music-sharing programs, might track Web use.

Kazaa spokeswoman Kelly Larabee says that like many companies offering free software, it needs to use that software to make money. "I think people understand when they take something for free, it needs to be supported."

That's true, say privacy experts. But unlike traditional ad-supported media, such as print and broadcast, technology changes everything online, and allows invisibility. "If you had someone set up a telescope outside your window, you'd be upset," says computer expert Steve Gibson of Laguna Hills, Calif. "The technology allows eavesdropping to go undiscovered. People don't understand how this can happen to their computer."

Gator, a company that has come under fire for the way it delivers ads, is now trying to lead an industry move toward full disclosure. Its software, bundled with several popular shareware programs, will automatically fill in Web forms for you. In return, you agree to share your surfing habits -- without being identified beyond your first name and ZIP code -- and to receive targeted pop-up ads.

The details are in the fine print, but Gator defends its practices by insisting that software companies that carry it state prominently that it will deliver pop-up ads. And Gator, which has 12 million active users, labels its ads and makes it easy to uninstall the software.

Last week, Gator proposed "rules of engagement" for the industry, encouraging advertisers to be more upfront: get consent to deliver ads, put attribution on all their ads so they're identified, and allow users to withdraw consent. "There are hugely bad practices," says Gator's Scott Eagle.

Privacy advocates say that regulation is needed. Sen. John Edwards, D-N.C., has twice introduced legislation aimed at forcing entities to disclose when they collect information. But the Spyware Control and Privacy Protection Act is unlikely to be passed anytime soon, experts say.

While the Federal Trade Commission can go after companies that violate their own privacy agreements, it's powerless to do anything about companies that collect data, no matter how invasive. "If you're asking for a black hole, you found one," says FTC commissioner Mozelle Thompson, adding the only way to change things is through "baseline privacy legislation."

Schools Declare File-swapping Truce

After an initial shock, U.S. universities are learning to live with file swapping among students on campus, despite legal risks and the heavy demands such activities place on computer networks.

When Napster burst onto the Net about two years ago, some campus network administrators blocked the software to avoid lawsuits and conserve resources. Now the legal threats to universities have receded and many of the technical problems that once plagued networks are being solved, giving network administrators more options when setting peer-to-peer usage policies, some college officials say.

"Students are essentially our customers, and we need to try to make them happy," said Russell Taylor, director of academic computing and information systems at Lees-McRae College, in Banner Elk, N.C. "Music and movies are out there to download, so rather than take a hard-and-fast line to block it...we decided it would be best to let it continue, but to limit it down until such a time it does become illegal."

Many schools, including the University of Georgia, Cornell University and Indiana University, publish Internet usage policies warning against software piracy. Some bear specific sections on sound recordings, pointing out that unauthorized copying of music files to a computer hard drive may violate federal copyright law.

Still, after initially cracking down on file swapping as courtrooms became rife with lawsuits from the entertainment industry, many colleges are now working to accommodate controlled levels of peer-to-peer activities over their networks.

Tolerance of file swapping on campus is partly attributed to the emergence of efficient management tools for network traffic, which could conceivably be used to harshly limit the practice. Companies such as Packeteer and NetReality have been marketing such products to schools for months and claim hundreds of clients.

Highlighting the growing flexibility of network management tools, NetReality this week announced an upgrade to its WiseWan technology that gives network managers three options for controlling peer-to-peer connections: They can slow access to low-priority applications, allow use only during certain hours, or block people from some programs entirely.

The company said the latest version of WiseWan will include a new peer-to-peer engine, enabling network managers to quickly identify new bandwidth-hogging applications and apply policies to control usage. For instance, a network manager using WiseWan could automatically see when people tap into file-swapping services such as Morpheus and Gnutella and discover how much bandwidth each person is consuming. The upgrade will also help network mangers identify and monitor HTTP-Tunnel, a technique that hides peer-to-peer traffic by making it resemble regular Internet traffic, enabling it to slip past firewalls.

"Any institution or enterprise can make a case for limiting the use of these (file-swapping applications) because they’re the ones paying for the bandwidth," said Phil Benyola, a digital media research associate for investment company Raymond James Financial. "There is a genuine demand for easy ways to prevent people from using the Internet for things other than work purposes."

Bandwidth management software could theoretically be used to block unauthorized peer-to-peer use on a network, but for now, customers in the academic market seem uninterested in choking off file swapping altogether.

Oregon State University, which banned Napster two years ago, is one of hundreds of academic institutions that have adopted more tolerant attitudes after installing peer-to-peer management technology.

The university discovered that peer-to-peer networks--most notably Morpheus and Kazaa--had been eating up 80 percent of its bandwidth, which "essentially brought all applications to a halt," said Jon Dolan, manager of network engineering at Oregon State.

To alleviate the congestion problem, the university installed a technology by Cupertino, Calif.-based Packeteer, in October, setting peer-to-peer networks--particularly Morpheus and Kazaa--as low priorities on the traffic system. Dolan said the device allows the university to manage its bandwidth and prioritize its traffic so people can surf the Web or download files for academic purposes without running into performance problems caused by peer-to-peer traffic.

With Packeteer’s technology, file-swapping programs "take a backseat when other things are going on," Dolan said. "We simply reiterated to all our students that they need to respect copyright material. The danger with these applications is that we can’t tell what’s copyright-protected and what’s not."

Oregon State said it paid about $35,000 for Packeteer’s technology. The company said it charges between $3,000 and $49,000. NetReality’s prices are similar, running from about $3,000 to $30,000. To date, NetReality said it has sold 3,000 units.

Northwestern University began blocking access to Napster two years ago, but it later ended the file-swapping ban when it installed bandwidth monitoring technology.

"We wanted to ensure that everyone who needed access to the Internet could get it," said Thomas Board, director of technology support services at Northwestern. "To that end, we wanted to make sure certain applications or protocols that have high demand for connectivity didn’t take up all the bandwidth that was available."

Board said peer-to-peer applications are still used within the campus network without restriction. However, the university has set up a Web site to inform people what the bandwidth management system is doing and the rules it has set for students. For instance, on the weekdays between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m., the university gives 25 percent of available bandwidth to high-demand applications, such as peer-to-peer networks. During the evenings and weekends, that jumps to 50 percent of available bandwidth.

Lees-McRae College faced similar problems. Music and film downloads comprised about 85 percent to 90 percent of the college’s traffic. Librarians, for instance, couldn’t use the online card catalog to look up a book, and students couldn’t conduct research using the college’s online periodicals database.

The college said it installed NetReality’s technology last fall, allocating only one third of its T1 line--about 500 kilobytes--to music and film downloads. Although students complained that the technology causes slower download times for file-swapping applications, school officials say they

are essentially regulating the traffic, not stopping students from using those applications entirely.

Peer-to-peer networks "are on the rise, and there are new ones literally appearing on a daily basis," said Kit Waugh, vice president of marketing and business development at NetReality. "It seems to be a problem that's kind of epidemic right now...so it's important to find a way to manage these things. Most people that want protection are not looking specifically to block the traffic; they're just looking to control it in a reasonable manner."

The shift in college networking policies highlights a legal gray area for the entertainment industry, which has so far aimed its anti-piracy efforts at developers of file-swapping software such as Napster and StreamCast Networks, the company behind Morpheus. The record labels have also pressed action against some individuals, a tactic that among other things led University of Oklahoma campus police to confiscate the computer of a student after a complaint from the Recording Industry Association of America.

Jonathan Lamy, a spokesman for the RIAA, said that for now the group is sticking to a hands-off approach on campuses, allowing individual schools to set their own policies.

"What we do is educate colleges and universities about copyright infringements, but we leave it to each school to decide what specific measures they will take against the unauthorized distribution of copyrighted work over the Internet," he said.

Although the legal terrain is still largely unmapped, at least one lawsuit has been filed seeking to hold schools liable for files swapped on their networks. Heavy metal band Metallica and rapper Dr. Dre, two of the earliest and most outspoken critics of file swapping, named three universities and Napster in a complaint, alleging copyright infringement. The schools--Yale University, Indiana University and the University of Southern California--were removed from the suit after they agreed to block access to Napster on their networks.

Since then, however, Yale and Indiana University have begun using bandwidth management software to allow some file swapping on campus networks.

It's unclear whether universities could be forced to introduce stricter policies. Like Internet service providers, schools are broadly protected from liability over illegal activities that take place on their networks, legal experts said. For example, under the Digital Millennium Copyright Act - the primary cudgel used by the recording industry to combat MP3 piracy - ISPs cannot be held liable for contributory copyright infringement if they remove allegedly infringing material upon notice from a copyright holder.

In addition, attorneys said peer-to-peer technologies appear to offer legitimate uses, particularly in an academic environment, that could make it difficult for colleges to justify banning them completely.

Howard King, the attorney who represented Metallica and Dr. Dre, said schools shut down Napster for three reasons--part legal, part moral and part technical. But he added that banning peer-to-peer technology on campus is likely too harsh a remedy.

"Not all peer-to-peer networks or peer-to-peer technology are illegal or bad," King said. "I’m sure there are substantial positive uses of these networks."

AOL Testing New Netscape as Alternative to Explorer

AOL Time Warner Inc.’s flagship AOL Internet unit is expected to start testing soon a Web browser using the guts of its Netscape technology, a source close to AOL said on Wednesday, opening up the possibility that the media giant plans to drop rival Microsoft Corp.’s Internet Explorer.

AOL spokesman Jim Whitney confirmed that the company has already shipped a Netscape browser in some test software for its discount Internet service, CompuServe. The browser is powered by Gecko technology that was developed through an open-source project called Mozilla.

The source said the same type of testing would be undertaken take at AOL, which has about 34 million members worldwide.

"We have put significant resources behind Netscape Gecko and it’s a great browser technology," said Whitney.

The trial rekindles the debate over a possible "battle of the browsers," with AOL dropping Microsoft’s browser technology and turning to its own Netscape technology as the two giants vie for control over various areas of the Internet.

AOL bought Netscape in 1999, but the browser technology that it was known for has floundered, leading many in the industry to speculate on the fate of Netscape. But news that AOL will soon be testing the technology that powers the browser suggests that AOL is not ready to abandon it.

The company’s contract with Microsoft to use the market-leading Internet Explorer expired in January 2001, but through "residual rights," AOL is free to use the browser technology for as long as it wants.

Microsoft dismissed speculation that AOL would move its 34 million subscribers away from Internet Explorer.

"AOL has been talking about trying to replace Internet Explorer for the last three to four years, but they have decided not to," said Microsoft spokesman Jim Cullinan.

In January, AOL sued Microsoft for damage done to Netscape, alleging the software giant’s unfair promotion of its Internet Explorer harmed the product.

Internet Explorer, which Microsoft bundled with its Windows operating system, was at the heart of the government’s antitrust suit against the Redmond, Washington-based company.

An appeals court cleared Microsoft of the specific charge of trying to monopolize the browser market but said the company, through various business practices, had unfairly competed with Netscape and other companies.

The underlying code of open source software is freely available, unlike

proprietary software from companies like Microsoft, whose inner workings are kept under lock and key.

AOL spokesman Jim Whitney said the Internet service provider is always testing different products and combinations, but declined to comment on whether future versions of AOL software would use the Gecko-rendering engine or if the company would keep using Internet Explorer.

"The expectation is that they will move back to the Netscape core," said Robert Enderle, analyst at Giga Information. "They own that core."

"Probably, AOL 8.0 would be the ideal time for it to show up," he added, referring to the next version of the company's software due out in the fall.

However, while Jupiter Media Metrix analyst David Card said it was likely AOL was testing different software, he thought the company would likely stick with Internet Explorer for the time being.

"If they did it, they could pull it off, though I don't see any benefit to it," Card said. "But it would be difficult. It is a big technology investment."

He said it was unlikely a serious software company would use alternative open-source software for its final products.

"Serious software companies don't ship open source. They may start with it but they build products on it," Card added. "You just have to be serious about the business and I don't think they are serious (about Netscape)."

$100,000 Hacker Challenge

A couple of high-tech challenges offer big prizes for folks who can do some serious code breaking.

Data security software vendor Meganet Corp. is offering a new Ferrari Modena 360 to anyone who can break its flagship Virtual Matrix Encryption. If you prefer cold cash, Bodacion Technologies promises $100,000 to any hacker savvy enough to break the encryption on its Hydra Internet servers.

Meganet's encryption is based on a million-byte algorithm. Bodacion's code uses chaos theory for its encryption. "The chaos is derived from functions used to describe cell growth," chief software architect Eric Uner says. "Any patterns which seem to reveal themselves quickly take a left turn."

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